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How does it feel to be old?

Edward Marston

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How does it feel to be Old ?



HENRY JENKINS
BORN 1500, DIED 1670, AGED 169 (see page 55)
(*Salmon Fisher for 140 years*)

How does it feel to be Old?

REPRINTED FROM THE "MONTHLY REVIEW,"
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BY

E. MARSTON, F.R.G.S.

AUTHOR OF "AFTER WORK," "BOOKSELLERS OF OTHER
DAYS," ETC.

DR. JOHNSON: "What, sir, would you know what it is
to feel the Evils of OLD AGE? Would you have the Gout?
Would you have decrepitude?"

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NOTE

A PORTION of the matter contained in this volume was first published in "THE MONTHLY REVIEW" some months ago. It is now reproduced here by the kind permission of Mr. John Murray. The subject is of interest to all—young as well as old—and is inexhaustible. The present little volume presumes to be no more than a fragmentary contribution. Many books have been written from the scientific point of view—laying down dietary and other laws for the prolongation of life, oftentimes contradicting each other. I am rather of opinion that every man, guided by common sense, should be "a law unto himself."

E. M.

LONDON,
August, 1907.



HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE OLD?

I

His hair just grizzled
As in a green old age.—DRYDEN.

THE answer to such a question cannot be limited to one individual of the *genus homo*. On such a subject so many old men, so many opinions. I therefore will not presume to generalize or to affirm that all old men feel or have felt as I have at different stages of their existence. That I *am* old, does not admit of question. How I became so I hardly know, and cannot describe. In my particular case, it seems to me that old age approached so gradually

and with such stealthy steps that its approach has been imperceptible, and it is only recently that I have found out, not so much, after all, by any grave change in my bodily activity, as by the *Anno Domini*, which tells me I was born nearly eighty-three years ago, and therefore I *must* be old. The first suggestion that ever reached me as to my personal appearance was that of an errand boy, who, replying to a question, said, "Yes! I gave it to the *old* gentleman with white hair," meaning me! That remark struck me forcibly at the time; perhaps as near to fifty as to forty years ago, and my hair was certainly not white, though perhaps grizzled; it surprised, and I think it may have offended me, for it was at a period of my life when I was in the enjoyment of vigorous health, and, as I fancied myself, quite young. It showed what a lad of twelve or fourteen must have thought about a man of thirty-five or forty! and it reminded me too, that when I had reached the same age, I looked upon my father and my uncles, none of whom were then more

than fifty, as being on the verge of very old age.

Sir Theodore Martin, when in his ninetyeth year, said, in his inaugural address as rector of St. Andrews University, what I should like to have said myself—so thoroughly do I agree with him.

“It is not years that make age,” he said on that occasion. “Frivolous pursuits, base passions unsubdued, narrow selfishness, vacuity of mind, life with sordid aims, or no aim at all—these are the things that bring age upon the soul. Healthful tastes, an open eye for what is beautiful and good in nature and in man, a happy remembrance of youthful pleasures, a mind never without some active interest or pursuit—these are the things that carry on the feelings of youth even into years when the body may have lost most of its comeliness and its force.”

It would be easy to find very many illustrations of Sir Theodore's axiom, “It is not years that make age.” Here is one

from a young gentleman who has just completed his *One Hundredth* year. It is taken from a newspaper cutting:

“‘Why, it’s nothing to make a fuss about; it’s just a tale that is told.’ This was the modest remark made by Mr. Henry Wright, of Halifax, who is one hundred years old.

“His sight and his hearing are not so good as they were a year or two ago, but with glasses he can see well enough to read his newspaper for hours at a stretch, and to write letters—in a surprisingly firm hand, by the way—and in conversation, at all events, his defective hearing is not a serious disadvantage.”

This interesting centenarian was, it appears, not a smoker of tobacco. Of such a one the question may have been asked: If he had been a smoker would he have lived so long?

“Tobacco he has always abjured—since one memorable day in his youth, which even now he recalls with a pang. Those

who declare tea to be a poison will get no support from Mr. Wright, who has been a great tea drinker all his life.

“Nor does his experience bear out the truth of the maxim of ‘early to bed and early to rise.’ He admits that he keeps ‘early’ hours—early morning hours. ‘If you called at one o’clock any morning the chances are that you would find me still out of bed. And,’ he added, ‘I have never had a serious illness, or even toothache, in my life.’

“Mr. Wright was reminded that an eminent doctor has recently declared that there is no reason why everybody should not live to be a hundred. ‘Ah!’ he retorts, ‘but they don’t.’ He attributes his long life to a naturally sound constitution and to careful living.”






II

SMOKING TOBACCO

Critics avaunt! Tobacco is my theme;
Tremble like hornets at the blasting steam.

I. H. BROWNE.

 CANNOT find it in my heart to abuse tobacco—for I have been a moderate smoker for sixty years—and even now, at my advanced age, I still thoroughly enjoy a cigar now and then; and yet I am far from being convinced that the excessive use of tobacco is not more of an evil than a blessing to the community. I am fully convinced that the health of the rising generation would be vastly improved if a law could be passed strictly forbidding the use of tobacco by children and the youth of the country, until at least the down had

appeared on their upper lips! Let adults do as they please. They all remember Charles Lamb's "Farewell to Tobacco," and are at liberty to adopt either of the two alternatives which I quote from that delightful poem.

Stinking'st of the stinking kind,
Filth of the mouth and fog of the mind,
Africa, that brags her foison,
Breeds no such prodigious poison.
Henbane, night-shade, both together
Hemlock, aconite—

Nay, rather,
Plant divine, of rarest virtue;
Blisters on the tongue would hurt you,
'Twas but in a sort I blamed thee;
Irony all, and feigned abuse,
Such as perplexed lovers use,
At a need, when, in despair
To paint forth their fairest fair.

More than forty years ago there was published a tiny little volume, about two inches square, entitled "The Smoker's Text-book," by John Hamer, F.R.S.L. It is printed in the type called "Brilliant," the smallest in the world. A charming little book, now, I believe, very scarce. In it I find that quaint

old poem ascribed to the Rev. Ralph Erskine, and sometimes called the "Erskine song." The first part of it, however, belongs to the time of James I, with the initials G. W. affixed to it. Here are two of the verses:

This Indian weed, now withered quite,
Tho' green at noon, cut down at night,
Shows thy decay,
All flesh is hay;
Thus think, and smoke Tobacco.

* * *

And when the pipe grows foul within,
Think on thy soul defiled with sin!
For then the fire
It doth require;
Thus think, and smoke Tobacco!

The royal author of "Counterblast to Tobacco" could hardly have been pleased with it!

If I were called upon to quote one of the many instances of change that have occurred in social life during the last seventy years, I should give tobacco-smoking as a very flagrant instance. When I was a boy

no gentleman was ever seen out of doors with a pipe in his mouth; it would have been looked on as a breach of good manners. Indoors smoking was of course admissible, but only in the smoke-room—and nowhere else. Now, *out-of-doors* it may almost be said to be a breach of good manners for a gentleman *not* to have a pipe in his mouth! Now, *indoors*, it is hardly too much to say that no room, whether drawing-room, bedroom, or boudoir, is sacred from the fumes of tobacco.

The conclusion I am compelled to arrive at is that excessive and indiscriminate tobacco-smoking does not tend to the prolongation of life into *old age*. Moderate use of it is quite another affair.

Having said the very worst that I could find in my heart to say about Tobacco, let me quote a few of the good things that have been said about it.

Thackeray says: "I, for my part, do not despair to see a Bishop lolling out of the Athenæum with a cheroot in his

B

mouth or at any rate a pipe stuck in his shovel hat."

Bulwer: "A pipe! It is a great comforter, a pleasant soother! Blue devils fly before its honest breath! It ripens the brain, it opens the heart, and the man who smokes, thinks like a sage and acts like a Samaritan."

Charles Kingsley: "A lone man's companion, a bachelor's friend, a hungry man's food, a sad man's cordial, a wakeful man's sleep, and a chilly man's fire."

"Wit's Recreations," 1640:

It helpeth digestion
Of that there 's no question,
The gout and the tooth-ache it easeth;
Be it early or late,
'Tis never out of date,
He may safely take it that pleaseth.

"Punch":

Learn to smoke slow. The other grace is,
To keep your smoke from people's faces.

Cowper:

The pungent, nose-refreshing weed,
Which, whether pulverized it gain
A speedy passage to the brain,
Or whether, touched with fire, it rise
In circling eddies to the skies,
Does thought more quicken and refine
Than all the breath of all the nine.





III

YOUTH AND AGE

What cared I for wind and weather
When youth and I were in it together!

COLERIDGE.



WHEN I was young the question which gives the title to this little book was one which often-times came upon me. It is a long time since, and I am of opinion now that in those days respect and even a kind of veneration for the old was by no means uncommon among the youth who were young when the nineteenth century had not long begun its marvellous career; but I speak not for others, I shall only attempt to express, *more meo*, my own youthful feeling towards old age. I confess at once

that it was a feeling of profound veneration. It seemed to me that an old man must in the course of his life have gone through most of the experiences which for me were yet to come; therefore, that he *knew* what I could only speculate on with doubt and uncertainty, and so he was entitled to my respect.

The following oft-quoted lines do not favour my assumption that veneration for the old was more common in the old days than it is to-day:

Young men *think* old men are fools;
But old men *know* young men are fools.

CHAPMAN.

That is a sweeping assertion, not altogether true at any time; but now that I have passed through the experience of a long life the impression has forced itself upon me that there is a growing truthfulness in the double assertion. Homer, in the Trojan Wars, puts into the mouth of the goddess of wisdom this saying: "The young men of this age generally believe themselves to be better men than their fathers or than

any of their ancestors." Being old, and remembering that I once was young, I do not desire to speak disrespectfully of the present generation of young people, but I will venture to say that this saying of the ancient goddess is quite borne out nowadays, and doubtless has been through all the generations; it is only when the young grow old that they discover its truthfulness. There are vast numbers of young people of both sexes who mistake self-conceit for wisdom and self-reliance. They have no regard for those who have grown old in another order of things; they look on old people as a set of fogies to be tolerated, but whose opinions are to be contemptuously disregarded; they only realize their own foolishness when they become old; then, in their turn, they look back on their own youthful conceit with proper contempt. Dryden truly says:

Men are but children of a larger growth.

Plato says:

"I delight in conversing with very old

persons; for as they have gone before us on the road over which, perhaps, we shall have to travel, I think we ought to try and learn from them what the nature of that road is; whether it be rough and difficult or smooth and easy."

Lord Bacon says:

"The errors of young men are the ruin of business, but the errors of aged men amount but to this, that more ought to have been done, or sooner. . . . Certainly it is good to compound employments of both: for that will be good for the present because the virtues of either age may correct the defects of both."

"The Worthe Booke of Old Age, by Marcus Tullius Cicero (now Englished by Thomas Newton)" contains many a noble picture of the virtues and vices of youth and age, from which I will quote a few lines here and there.

"CATO. Unto such as lead their lives virtuously, measuring all their actions by

the square of reason, and have their minds with all good gifts of grace beautified and garnished, there is nothing thought nor deemed evil that cometh by necessity of nature. Of the which sort Old Age is principally to be considered, unto which all men wish to arrive, and yet when they have their desire they accuse it as painful, sickly, unpleasant, and tedious, such is the brainless inconsistency, foolish sottage, and perverse overthwartness of wayward people."

* * * *

"LAELIUS. There are some will peradventure say unto you, your old age seemeth to you tolerable enough because of your great wealth, riches, and dignity; but there be a great number of others which cannot have such ample possessions, nor such extraordinary help to alleviate and condulcate the asperity and unpleasantness of their decrepit age."

"CATO. It may be said of *old age*: In extreme penury, scarcity, and indigence, it cannot be easily abidden, borne, and

tolerated, no, not of a wise man. Neither it cannot be but cumbersome, and grievous to him that is a fool, although he have never so great plenty and abundance of all things.

* * * *

“When a man hath led his former life quietly, uprightly, godly, and laudably, his old age is very mild, pleasant, and courteous, such as the old age of PLATO was, who, in the eighty-first year of his age, died as he sat writing. Of ISOCRATES it is said that he wrote his work entitled ‘Panathenaicus’ in the ninety and fourth year of his age, and lived five years after; whose schoolmaster, Leontinus Gorgias, lived fully a hundredth [*sic*] and seven years, and never fainted, drooped, nor gave over his study which he had in hand.”





IV

TIME'S FOOTSTEPS

How noiseless falls the foot of Time,
That only treads on flowers.

W. R. SPENCER.



WHAT are the stages of life in which one can physically trace the insidious footsteps of Father Time? When one is tolerably free from bodily ailments life's progress glides on from day to day, from year to year, imperceptibly. In our infancy all is brightness, cheerfulness, and hope. The spring is the youth of the year, "its flowers are the flowers of promise and the darlings of poetry." Autumn is the youth of old age; it too has its flowers, but they remind us too much of the sere and yellow leaf and the near approach of "change and decay," and the winter of senile apathy.

"Years rush by us [says Sir Walter Scott] like the wind; we see not where the eddy comes nor whitherward it is tending, and we seem ourselves to witness their flight, without a sense that we are changed; and yet time is beguiling man of his strength, as the winds rob the woods of their foliage."

"Our ancestors," says Malone, "considered men as old whom we now esteem as middle-aged. Every man who had passed fifty seems to have been accounted an old man."

Some men arrive at old age in a state of bodily and mental decrepitude; some with clear heads and weak bodies; some with strong and healthy bodies and weak minds; and perhaps for all who live long enough there comes

A second childishness, and mere oblivion ;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

"What is the life of man? Is it not to shift from side to side: from sorrow to

sorrow? To button up one cause of vexation, and unbutton another?"—*Smollett*.

But there are some really happy old men, and perhaps even more happy old women, who reach extreme old age in the full enjoyment of every mental and bodily faculty: a perpetual joy to themselves and a source of happiness to all who surround them.

One of the obvious secrets of attaining such an old age is to begin life with a healthy mind in a healthy body. Blest with that to start with, a boy or youth has a world of happiness in front of him if he only truly values the blessing with which nature has endowed him. He has but to exercise prudence and moderation and temperance in all things and at all times, in eating and drinking, and in taking proper exercise, and, barring accidents, to which all flesh is heir, a healthy old age must ensue. Our common ancestor, Adam, desired to know the meaning of old age and death.

“But is there yet no other way, besides
These painful passages, how we may come
To death, and mix with our connatural dust?”

And the Archangel Michael thus replied:

“There is, said Michael, if thou well observe
The rule of—Not too much; by temperance taught,
In what thou eat'st and drink'st; seeking from
thence

Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight;
Till many years over thy head return,
So mayst thou live, till, like ripe fruit, thou drop
Into thy mother's lap, or be with ease
Gather'd, not harshly pluck'd; for death mature:
This is old age; but then, thou must outlive
Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty; which will
change

To wither'd, weak, and gray; thy senses then,
Obtuse, all taste of pleasure must forego,
To what thou hast.”

Our ancestor did not seem to be much enamoured with this prospect of old age before him. He said:

“Henceforth, I fly not death, nor would prolong
Life much; bent rather, how I may be quit,
Fairest and easiest, of this cumbrous charge,

Which I must keep till my appointed day
Of rendering up, and patiently attend
My dissolution."

Michael replied:

"Nor love thy life, nor hate ; but what thou livest
Live well. How long or short permit to Heaven."

MILTON.






V

SIGHT—SPECTACLES

With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side.

 N a very early stage of one's pilgrimage one is surprised to notice just a few white hairs conspicuous among the dark brown. Year by year they steadily increase, but one regards them as naught; for we fancy and believe ourselves to be as lithe and as active as we ever were, and as equal as ever to all kinds of vigorous exertion. Life marches on, and perhaps the first time we feel ourselves really pulled up we, amazed, cry out, "What can be the meaning of this?" How is it that we cannot read this very small diamond print? We, who had always prided ourselves on

our long sight as well as short sight. There is surely something wrong, not with our eyes, of course, but with the light; some defect in the gas or lighting of the room; a slight mist which prevents our seeing this very small print. We inquire. We are assured there is really nothing wrong with the gas or the light; and at last we are driven back to the conclusion that the defect must be in our eyesight! Then it was that, at about two-thirds of the way on life's long journey, spectacles had to come in to repair the ravages. Long-distance sight apparently as good as ever; later on came a time when one pair of spectacles was needed for distant sight, and another pair for reading or writing. That was a stage distinctly marked and acutely felt. No longer could we walk through a picture-gallery with any sense of pleasure. The near-sighted glasses were too near, and the distance glass looked too far away; it was found difficult to get the pictures into a proper focus for the eye. That was a distinct deprivation; and yet we found it diffi-

cult to accept the fact that we are growing old! The truth really must be that we do not "see ourselves as others see us!" We fancy ourselves to be still young and gay, whilst young folk see us from a totally different standpoint. It is a curious fact that the other day only, when there can no longer be a question about our *growing* old, seeing that we *are* old beyond all discussion, we found we could discern objects in the far distance—the time on a church clock-tower, for example—far more distinctly by looking over the top of our long-distance glasses than by looking through them. This has now become so marked as to render the distance glasses almost useless; we can see better without them. Is it because the long sight is gradually becoming clearer or that the glasses are defective?





VI

HEARING

I hear a voice you cannot hear.

TICKELL.

UP to the time of this present writing we have no consciousness of any diminution in the sense of hearing, though many people seemed to have assumed that we *ought* to be, and therefore that we *must* be, deaf, and accordingly shout in our ears in a very unnecessary way. Mine ears, I think, have hitherto performed their natural functions with satisfaction to myself. If one's ears were to be taken as a test of youth or age we would be pleased to fancy ourselves still on the very youthful side of old age.



VII

MEMORY

Remember thee?

Ay, thou poor ghost, while *memory holds a seat*
In this distracted globe.

Hamlet.



H! here one's self-confidence is
apt to break down! If one
could, as Hamlet says:

From the table of our memory wipe away all trivial
fond records

it would in one's old age leave a little room
still for making a more permanent record
of things and names and events and persons
as they daily present themselves to us, but
which have now such a sad way of escaping.
It is, doubtless, owing to the fact that during
the lapse of many years "the table of one's
memory" has become so overladen with

“trivial fond records” that there is no room left for further records; and consequently one reads a fascinating novel, for instance, with much satisfaction; and for a day or two afterwards one could remember all the characters, plot, and events, heroes, and heroines—then they gradually fade away; there is no room on the tablet to hold them permanently. Such forgetfulness would be of small moment, or, indeed, a blessing; but when one forgets and cannot in any reasonable time recall the name of an intimate friend with whom we dined only a week ago, and we suddenly meet him, it becomes really embarrassing—such things are convincing proofs that old age is upon us.

This lack of memory, however, is not peculiar to old age. Dr. Johnson gives us this consolation:

“If a young or middle-aged man, leaving a company, does not recollect where he laid his hat, it is nothing; but if this same inattention is discovered in an old

man, people will shrug up their shoulders and say, 'His memory is going.' "

"Neither did I ever hear," says Cicero, "of any old man that had so weak a memory to forget in what place he laid his purse and hid his treasure."

"CATO. But the memory (you will perhaps say) in old men faileth, and waxeth daily worse and worse. I believe it well, if a man do not use and exercise it, or if a man be of a dull or blockish nature. Themistocles knew every person in the city, and could call every man by his proper name. Do you think that in his old age he used to name one man instead of another, and to salute Aristides instead of Lysimachus? And I do not only know them that are yet alive, but their fathers and grandfathers also which are dead."





VIII

SLEEP AND SLEEPLESSNESS

Sleep covers a man all over, thoughts and all, like a cloak: it is meat for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, heat for the cold, and cold for the hot.

Don Quixote.

NOW blessings light on him that first invented sleep," says Sancho Panza. I am not one of those "sleek-headed men and such as sleep o' nights." I am a bad sleeper. I sometimes comfort myself with the reflection that the older one grows the less sleep one requires—the less sleep the more time to improve the short balance of life before the final plunge into eternity. In the course of my life I have had many a long night of anxious worry about worldly

affairs, as most people have had; but such nights were only occasional. I think it must have been in the days now long past, when I had reached the span of three score years and ten allotted by the Psalmist, that I found this sleeplessness becoming chronic, and that not from worldly worry or from pain of any kind, but simply that I lay abed in ease and comfort, yet wide awake hour after hour. At first I made all sorts of efforts to beguile sleep, hundreds of times have I counted a thousand backwards and forwards. Many a night have I fixed my gaze on one spot of light; but sleep would not be wooed that way. I have repeated over and over again many an old and favourite hymn of other days; but nature would not be won. I heard the clock strike every hour, and sleep came not. Boswell states that Lord Monboddo was in the habit of taking what he called an air bath, naked and with his window open; well, even that I have tried, and thoroughly rubbing my back and limbs with a rough towel, found it, though not a

particularly agreeable, yet a fairly effective, means of inducing sleep. Then, years ago, I took to that baneful habit, as most people would call it, of reading in bed.





IX

READING IN BED

And then to sleep but three hours in the night,
And not be seen to wink of all the day.

Love's Labour's Lost.



AND I now say, with dear old Sancho, "blessings light on him who first invented" electric lighting. With a light above my head and a switch close to my hand, I read all kinds of literature—sacred and profane. The Bible and fiction, sermons and poetry, not, be it remembered, so much for edification, as to invite sleep and to pass the time. When I begin to feel drowsy I switch off, and then sometimes I sleep, and sometimes the very act of switching wakes me up and I read on. This has now become a habit, whether for

good or ill. I retire about 10.30, and from that time till about 2.30 sleep is banished from my pillow, four hours at least I have to get through as best I can. Then I sleep sometimes for an hour, sometimes for two or three hours without a break, then follows another spell of wakefulness, and not unfrequently do I find myself fast asleep when, at about seven o'clock, comes the usual knock at the door. Very often in such a case I am driven to cry out, "A little more sleep, and a little more slumber, and a little folding of the hands in sleep!" and I jump out of bed.

If out of eight hours of bed I get four hours' sleep I am thankful. I am aware that this continuously broken sleep cannot be regarded as an indication of good health. I only state it as a fact, and that I do not feel the deprivation as a burden. I do not offer these remarks by way of advice or caution to others, I only relate my own experience. I indulge in no fads, either in eating, drinking, or sleeping. I am aware that many of my habits of living are quite

against and contrary to all authorities— but here I am, enjoying very good health in my *eighty-third* year, as a proof that my *régime* suits myself—it may not suit others. My own opinion is that it matters very little *what* one eats, so long as one does not eat too much. As for drink, it would not be quite true if I were to call myself a “total abstainer,” but it is only on very rare occasions that I drink anything stronger than water.

I may say that my “quiet nights,” though often sleepless, are not restless; I confess to much enjoyment in “reading in bed.” I will quote a few lines from Miss Christina G. Rossetti, whose poems I find, in certain moods, very great pleasure in reading:

Man's life is but a waking day
Where tasks are set aright;
A time to work, a time to pray,
And then a quiet night.
And then, please God, a quiet night
Where palms are green and robes are white.
A long drawn breath, a balm of sorrow
And all things lovely on the morrow.



X

WALKING AND RUNNING

Lest, running thither,
We unawares run into danger's mouth.
Samson Agonistes.

HERE are two more indicators on the road of life. In the early and middle stages outdoor exercises are common to us all; walking long distances, and running upstairs three or four steps at a time (the latter perhaps not very dignified) are indications of exuberant health, and sometimes these accomplishments pursue us into the early stages of old age; the time, however, inevitably comes when one's feet seem to cling a little to the ground; the springiness and elasticity of arms and legs and feet are on the decline of the road. No

longer can one venture upstairs three steps at a time, and even two steps are a little hazardous, but at this stage the performance was continuous with us for many years; so that between the years of fifty and, say, seventy-five, judging ourselves by ourselves, no difference was perceptible, while others may note in us a difference we have been incapable of discerning. During this latter period one's personal and social feelings had undergone a gradual if imperceptible change; the implicit faith one may have been too apt to place in one's fellow creatures may have been somewhat shaken. It has, however, been reserved for a later period even than that of seventy-five to convince us that we are growing old. When we go a-fishing, for example, we can still handle our rod and cast a fly with as much precision as ever, nor does it fatigue us more than of yore; but stiles and fences and barbed wire! these are our stumbling-blocks; we cannot get over or through them with our former agility, and we hate to exhibit our little

weaknesses to our friends, and to be *helped* here and there. "There is nothing," says Johnson, "against which an old man should be so much on his guard as *putting himself to nurse*," and I agree with him. Again, the time does not seem far distant when we scorned to hail an omnibus ; it was our pride, or rather folly, to run and jump on the foot-board: the same on getting out while the 'bus went bowling along; but we did the latter once too often. On descending one day from a going 'bus, one foot touched the ground whilst the other unaccountably clung for a second to the foot-board, and we fell sprawling across the road, and a hansom cab dashed by within a few inches of our head. That was an instance of the rash folly of old age, and it taught us a lesson of humility, for it is never too late to mend our ways.

I will give one other instance which has occurred since the foregoing lines were written, and I give it not as an instance of rashness, but as a singular proof of one of the real infirmities of old age which seem to

encompass us on all sides. I was passing along the Strand, somewhat overladen with books and other small packages. Just on crossing the top of one of those narrow streets which branch from the Strand southward, a cab suddenly turned into it, and, rather missing the turn, dashed on to the pavement and sent me reeling on my back; my head most fortunately struck the leg of a man who was leaning on a post—a lucky “leg hit”—and I happily escaped with a severe shaking. It was just one of those accidents which might have happened to any one—but what struck me at the moment of the collision was that I went down like a ninepin just touched by a ball, without the power to help myself. I asked myself even as I was falling why I didn’t get out of the way, and the answer was, “because you *couldn’t*, my boy—you *are too old!*” Any way, it was an affair for which one may feel most thankful that it was no worse!

Old age, after all, is not a thing to boast of, it is the heirloom of all who live long

enough; and it is well to remember Lord Bacon's words: "A stout, healthy old man is like a tower undermined."

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
Lets in new light through chinks that time has
made;

Stronger by weakness, wiser men become
As they draw near to their eternal home.

WALLER.

"CATO. It is not the hoar head and wrinkled face which by and by bringeth honour and purchaseth estimation, but it is an honest and godly life that hath ever been conversant and trained in virtue, which getteth dignity and high authority in the end. . . . But many old men be wayward, ill to please, louting, cumbersome, fretting and chafing, whining and inexorable, and (if we thoroughly sift out the matter) miserable niggards and pinchpennies also. But all these are not the faults peculiar to old age, but incident to them whose naughty manners be subject and disposed thereunto."



XI

ANGLING AND OLD AGE

God never did make a more calm, quiet, innocent recreation than angling.

The Complete Angler.



THAT angling is a pursuit conducive to old age is proved by the length of life of many who have devoted themselves to it. Of these, Izaak Walton himself may be taken as an excellent example. He was born 9th August, 1593, and he died 15th December, 1683.

Whose well-spent life did last
Full ninety years and past.

He was called "the common father of all anglers," and he tells of other celebrities who were lovers of the angle, and who lived to great age. "Iz. Wa.", as he signed him-

D

self on the title-page of his first edition of "The Complete Angler," was a happy man. "Let me tell you, sir," says he,

"there be many men that are by others taken to be serious and grave men, whom we contemn and pity. Men that are taken to be grave, because nature hath made them of a sour complexion; money-getting men, men that spend all their time, first in getting, and next in anxious care to keep it; men that are condemned to be rich, and then always busy or discontented: for these poor rich men, we anglers pity them perfectly, and stand in no need to borrow their thoughts to think ourselves so happy."

Among others, he mentions that most learned physician, Dr. Wharton, who had the courage to practise in London during the great plague, when most of his contemporaries fled. "A dear friend," says he, "that loves both me and my art of angling."

"But," he goes on,

“I will content myself with two memorable men, whom I take also to have been ornaments to the art of angling. The first is Dr. Nowel, sometime Dean of St. Paul’s. This good man was a dear lover and constant practiser of angling as any age can produce. His custom was to spend . . . a tenth of his time in angling: and also to bestowing a tenth part of his revenue, and usually all his fish, amongst the poor that inhabited near to those rivers in which it was caught, saying often ‘that charity gave life to religion.’ . . . He died at the age of ninety-five, 13th February, 1601, forty-four years of which he had been Dean of St. Paul’s. His age neither impaired his hearing, nor dimmed his eyes, nor weakened his memory, nor made any of the faculties of his mind weak or useless. It is said that angling and temperance were great causes of these blessings.”

The other example given by Izaak Walton is that of “that undervaluer of money”

the late provost of Eton College, Sir Henry Wotton:

“ A man with whom I have often fished and conversed . . . this man was a most dear lover and a frequent practiser of the art of angling: of which he would say: ‘ It was an employment for his idle time, which was not then idly spent: for angling was, after tedious study, ‘ a rest to his mind, a cheerer of his spirits, a diverter of sadness, a calmer of unquiet thoughts, a moderator of passions, a procurer of contentedness’ and that it ‘ begat habits of peace and patience in those that professed and practised it.’ ”

Sir Henry Wotton was beyond seventy years of age when, as he sat quietly, on a summer’s evening, on a bank a-fishing, he wrote that delightful poem of which the following are the first lines:

This day dame nature seem’d in love ;
The lusty sap began to move ;
Fresh juice did stir th’ embracing vines
And birds had drawn their valentines.

The jealous trout that low did lie
Rose at a well-dissembled flie
There stood my friend with patient skill,
Attending of his trembling quill.

The instances I have given of old men anglers, from Izaak Walton and men of his day, may be easily multiplied by men of to-day, who attribute their good health and long life to their love of the river side.

Among living anglers, I know of no one whose name could be mentioned with more distinction than the inventor of the celebrated salmon and trout fly called *Greenwell's Glory*, nor, as an example of the healthful longevity which angling promotes, than that of Canon Greenwell himself, who, now in his eighty-seventh year, goes out fishing regularly, and regularly performs his duty in Durham Cathedral. He is regarded with great veneration and affection by all the people of the city. One of those characters whose life at some future date should be written by another Izaak Walton, to rank with those other "lives" of Donne,

Hooker, Wotton, and others written by the "Iz. Wa." of the seventeenth century.

I have just been told of an old gentleman still living in Wales. He married when he was thirty-seven, and he has a daughter who is sixty-seven. She therefore claims that he must be at least one hundred and four, but he himself says he is a hundred. His only occupations in life are fishing and chewing tobacco. He makes his own flies, and is as enthusiastic and as successful now as ever he was. Where would he have been by now if he hadn't fished and chewed tobacco? These are his only comforts.

I have been an angler myself for many years, and even yet I am never so happy as when the opportunity arises of a ramble "in green pastures," and "beside the still waters"—always, of course, with a fly rod in my hand and a creel on my back. This is why I mention angling in connection with old age. I do not wish it to be inferred that I am such a crank upon angling as to imagine that because all anglers are

strong, robust, vigorous, cheerful, generous-minded men (and these are the elements out of which long life springs), that, therefore, all men who wish to become long-lived should become anglers! nothing of the kind. Anglers, like poets, are born, not made! I do not want to make converts, I only state facts.

Since writing the foregoing I have been reminded of another ancient angler, compared with whom I myself am but a boy. HENRY JENKINS, to whose portrait I give the place of honour, was born at Bolton-on-Swale in the year 1500; followed the employment of fishing one hundred and forty years. When about twelve years old was sent to Northallerton with a load of arrows for the army of the Earl of Surrey. Was buried in Bolton-on-Swale churchyard, 6th December, 1670, aged one hundred and sixty-nine. He made artificial flies, without spectacles, the year before he died—and he himself said that he could “dub a hook” with any man in Yorkshire.




XII

HOW TO LIVE TO BE A HUNDRED.

Hides from himself his state, and shuns to know
That life protracted is protracted woe.

JOHNSON.

N the foregoing pages my aim has been to try to convey to the reader's mind how I, as an individual, a mere atom in the world's economy, *feel*, now that I am approaching the end of my destiny. The rules laid down by General Booth in the "Daily Mail" the other day as his own guide for living, are most admirable; but surely they are not a discovery of to-day—they are just the laws which have governed humanity from the beginning of time. In what do they differ from the lesson which (according to Milton) the Archangel Michael

taught our forefather Adam, in the lines I have already quoted. For my own part I have no desire to live to be a hundred. I rather feel as Adam felt:

I fly not death, nor would prolong
Life much,

and I desire to apply to myself the angel's advice:

Nor love thy life, nor hate, but what thou livest,
Live well. How long or short, permit to heaven.

This question, which is now being discussed in the columns of the "Daily Mail" is akin to that which is the subject of this little book. With the editor's permission I will close this volume by reprinting my letter which appeared in the "Daily Mail" under the above heading:

"Our common ancestor, Adam, lived 930 years, and his wife lived to the same respectable old age. Some of their descendants lived much longer, notably Jared, who was 962, and Methuselah, the longest liver on record, was 969, while

Noah was not far behind. Then the decline is rapid till we come down to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who respectively reached 175, 180, and 147. In our later days Old Parr, as a solitary exception, reached only 152¹ and that doubtless owing to a liberal avoidance of his own pills.

“Now your readers are puzzling their brains to find out the best way of reaching a hundred. ‘When Adam delved and Eve span’ they had not much time for luxurious living and idleness. You may be sure that good Scotch oatmeal porridge formed the principal part of their diet; that, and the wholesome exercise of ploughing and sowing and reaping and mowing, fully accounts for their length of days. Since those good old primitive times the race has gradually degenerated; perhaps the food which mother earth provides for her children is not so fertilizing as it used to be. We of to-day, who possess a thousand refine-

¹ Except Henry Jenkins. See *ante*, p. 55.

ments which our ancient relations never heard of, are struggling to discover the long-lost secret, the elixir vitae which shall help us to live one hundred years! The Psalmist gives us a general limit of three score years and ten, or if perchance four score years are reached, then is 'our strength labour and sorrow.'

"For my own part I happened to be one of the few exceptions to this general rule. I have travelled along the pilgrimage of life far beyond the Psalmist's limit, and with a grateful heart I am able to say that from my childhood onwards my bodily health has always been good; like most other folk, I have had my share of trouble and sorrow. I should like to assure your anxious readers that, although physically I enjoy my life, I am neither deaf nor blind, I can walk ten miles in a day with ease, and occasionally I go a-fishing; but I have no particular anxiety or desire to prolong my days on earth.

"All that is needed to promote the

chances of growing very old is a healthy constitution to start with, and then the exercise of common sense in the practice of temperance in all things, moderation in eating and drinking, without the indulgence of fads of any kind, pure air and plenty of outdoor exercise, a cheerful habit of mind, trust in God and a desire to do good to one's fellow creatures, avoidance of greed and selfishness. These are the things that are likely to bring a man peace at the last. Then what does it matter whether you live to be a hundred or whether you are called upon to depart at a much earlier period?"



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